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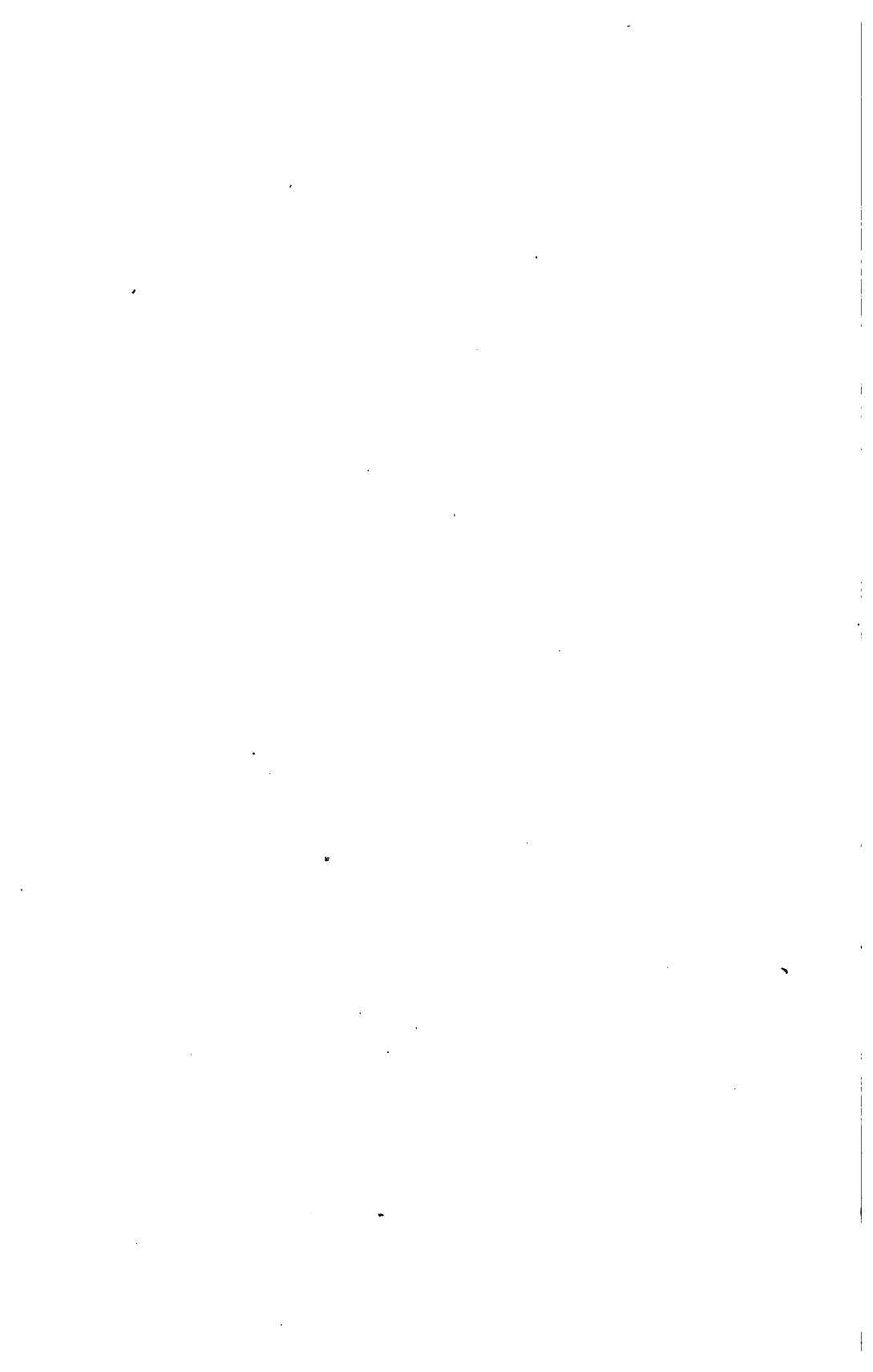
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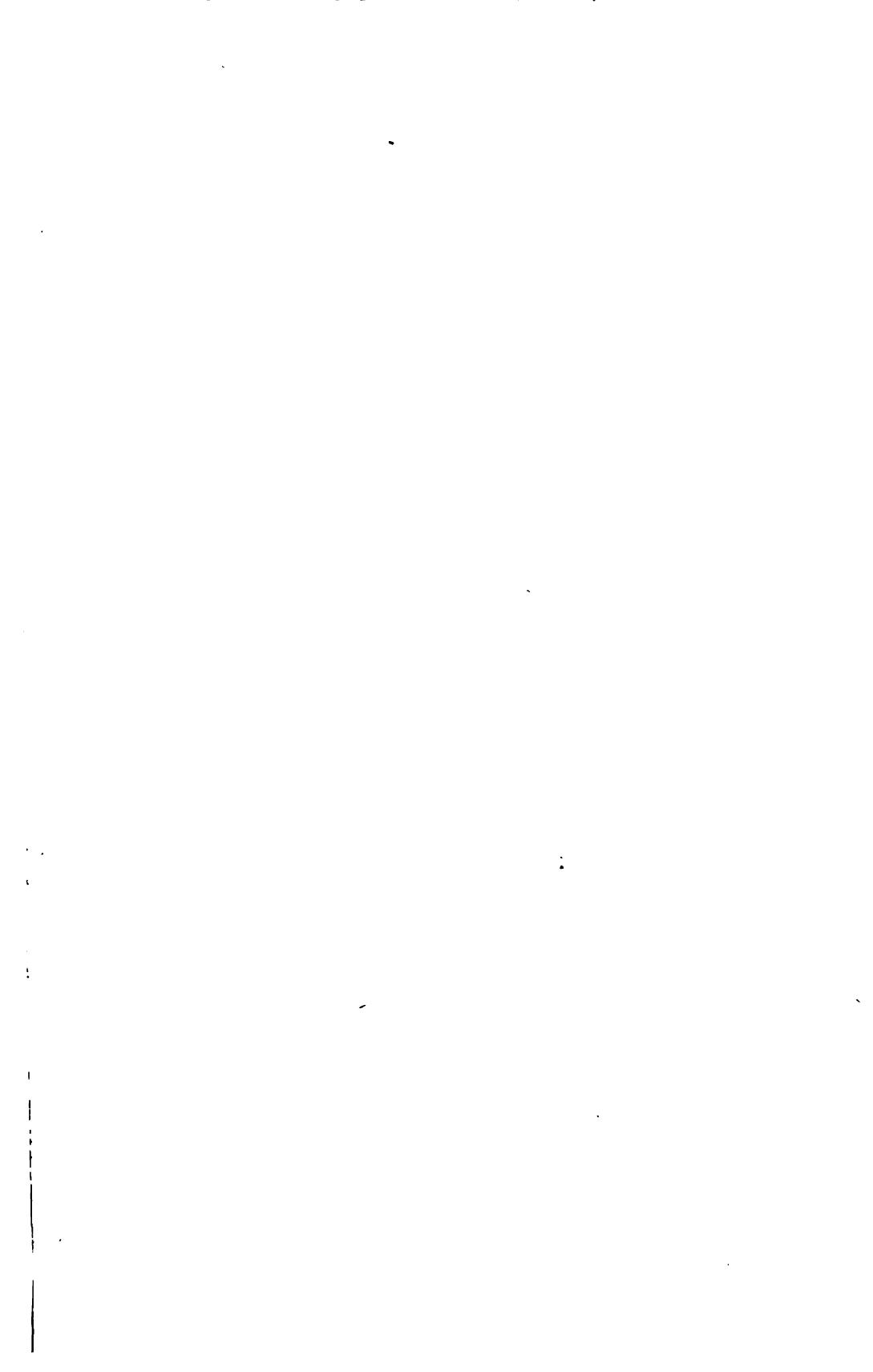
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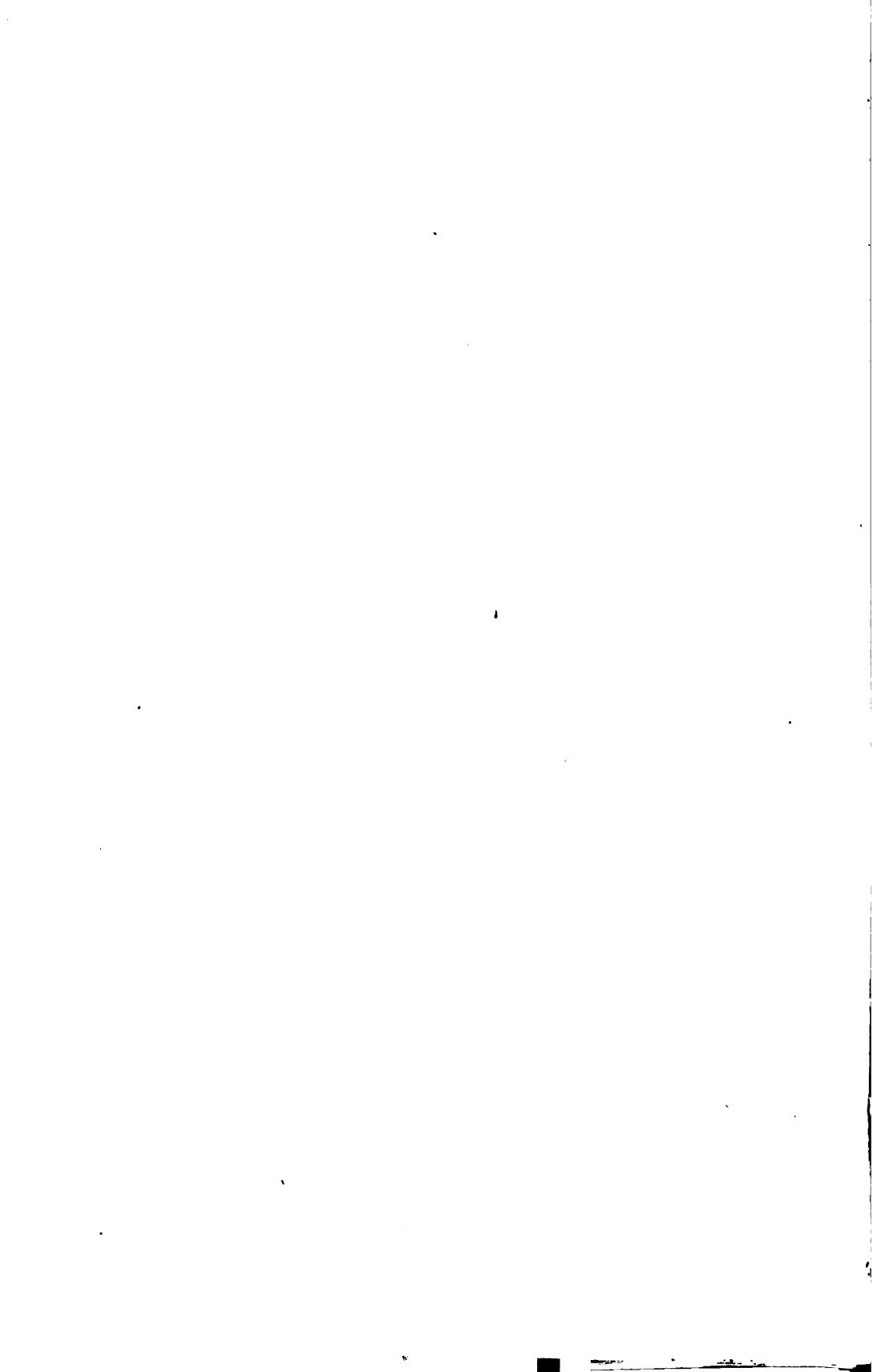












**ELISABETH REBECCA SPRAGUE**

**A TRIBUTE**



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*When hearts whose truth was proven,  
Like thine are laid in earth,  
There should a wreath be woven  
To tell the world their worth.*





THIS is the story of a quiet life, a life for the most part devoted to the nearest duties. Yet this quiet life was so full of wide and ever-widening influence and beneficence, so rich in friendships, so inspiring in its example of devotion to duty, whether to the family or the state, so beautiful in its loving kindness and exquisite courtesy of daily habit of intercourse, so deeply encouraging in its never flagging growth, that its story is the right of those who loved her.

It is interesting, also, as the portrait of a New England gentlewoman living during a most picturesque epoch of our history, connected by her birth and position with the most eminent of New England, associated with all the forces of the time.

Most of all is it a life to give hope. The service to her family, her state, and her country was not the less important that it was given

so unobtrusively. She was a blessing to her kindred and her friends, and an ever present help to the poor and needy. Nor did this power of helpfulness wane with the years; rather it grew steadily and continuously as years advanced.

And finally, from the days when a laughing, quick-witted, and high-spirited child, sometimes sharp of tongue to her followers, but always generous, loyal, and loving, played in Pemberton Square, with the ample old Georgian houses blinking their many paned windows above their wrought-iron balconies, and the old-fashioned doorplates bearing historic names on their shining brass, to the days when the courteous and gracious lady whom we all loved gathered her friends about her in her stately drawing-room on the noble avenue which had not so much as a foothold during her childhood, it was a happy life — a life of many keen sorrows, but a happy life; and the happiness as well as the sorrow sprang from her unselfish love. She was a happy daughter and sister, and a most happy wife; this in spite of the fact that her mother died,

that her father's health gave way immediately after, making him dependent on her care for the short remainder of his life, that her husband's father was an invalid, confined to his room for many years, and later, that one by one the brothers and sisters whom she loved left the world, until she was the last of her family. Through sickness, through loss and anxiety, through weary bodily pain, her high courage remained and her daily cheerfulness.

Surely such a life has an enduring inspiration.

The one who knew her best has briefly outlined its main events.

"Mrs. Sprague filled so large a place in the hearts of her relatives and friends, and gave so much of her time and labor for the benefit of others, that her memory deserves something more than a passing notice, and claims a recognition that shall endure. Although her life was an uneventful one, it was filled with good deeds and kindly courtesies and warm affections, and behind these was a personality which created for her a wide circle of friends and admirers, to whom these few words of affectionate remembrance are addressed.

Her father, John Amory Lowell, widely known for his high character and intellect, and as the administrator of the Lowell Institute, was twice married, first to Susan Cabot Lowell, who had two children, a son and a daughter; second to Elizabeth Cabot Putnam, a daughter of Judge Putnam of Salem, by whom he had one son and three daughters. Mrs. Sprague was the eldest of the daughters by the second marriage, and the last survivor of the six brothers and sisters.

The Lowells were of distinguished family, and held high place both in the social and intellectual world. Their home exemplified the best traits of New England life, and was the scene of much pleasant hospitality. The mother of Mrs. Sprague was a hostess of rare grace and dignity, and her entertainments had an air of distinction not easily equaled; but her great object in life was the welfare of her family and those near to her, and to these she gave unremitting care and devotion. Her daughter inherited her disinterestedness and self-sacrificing spirit, and was always ready to help others.

Such opportunities readily occur when one's thoughts are turned towards them, and Mrs. Sprague, in the midst of her social duties and pleasures, found time to give assistance in many directions. She was early interested in charitable work and charitable societies. She labored zealously in the ranks of the Sanitary Commission, organized during our Civil War, and appealing especially to the women of the country for aid in its task of ministering to the wants of our soldiers. She helped largely in the work of her church, the historic King's Chapel, for which she had a love and loyalty that never ceased.

As time went on her sympathies and interests enlarged, and she took part in more public matters. A true Bostonian, anything connected with the history or improvement of her native city appealed to her; and fortunately of late years the influence of women has been brought to bear on many civic questions. The preservation of our State House, which a few years since was in great danger of being torn down, to be replaced by a new structure, was largely the work of patriotic women, and among these

**Mrs. Sprague was an earnest and efficient co-worker.**

The limitation of the height of buildings and the enforcement of the law concerning them, the saving from destruction of the Old South Church, the protection of the Common from encroachment of various kinds, and the preservation of its trees were some of the matters in which she was actively interested by word and deed. She was foremost in the attempt made several years ago, by means of an appeal to the city government, to relieve the main thoroughfares of the city from the crowd of electric cars, which at that time were a source of great danger and inconvenience. Although this appeal had no immediate result, its force and the way it was presented aroused public attention to the necessity of some remedy, and led, through much opposition, to the construction of the subway. Later, when the railway company sought to replace the tracks on Tremont Street on the plea of public convenience, she was among those who opposed this return to old conditions, and who, despite the influence of a powerful corporation

and a hostile press, finally won over the support of the public, and defeated the measure.

These large questions, while holding a place in her thoughts, and benefiting by her energy and liberality, were not allowed to interfere with other claims, or those daily duties which seem so insignificant in detail, yet in bulk are so important. She had no desire to attract public notice, but was essentially a domestic person, who found pleasure in her charities, in the activities and intercourse of daily life, and in all matters pertaining to her family or friends. Her charities were many, and received a large share of her attention. Some of them, which remained unchanged, were of long standing. In one society she served thirty-eight years; in another thirty-two years; in a third twenty-three years. This did not mean a mere formal membership, but an active participation in all that concerned the society and its work. Where she could not give of her services, she gave of her means.

What has been written may serve in some degree to indicate how full her life was, and how broad were the channels in which it ran,

but her many occupations and all that she accomplished in more private ways cannot well be recorded. It is still more difficult to describe the spirit that animated all she did, or the qualities of mind and heart that attracted to her so many friends. The foundation of her character was a practical wisdom and good sense, combined with a loyalty, a sympathy, and a disinterestedness unsurpassed. She had great energy and industry, and a perseverance that carried through whatever she undertook, no matter how long or tiresome the task. She accomplished much because she had the enviable faculty of utilizing those fragments of time that appear of so little consequence, yet can be made so productive. She seized upon the spare half hours, or even the few stray moments, she found at her disposal, and made them serve her purpose. She possessed, moreover, the accompanying gift of being able to turn readily from one subject to another. Interruption seldom troubled her, and she could resume whatever had previously occupied her thoughts without difficulty. As might be inferred, her mind worked easily and directly, going straight

to the substance of the matter before her. This was especially noticeable in her writing. She wrote without hesitancy, yet expressed herself with a clearness and compactness that rarely required revision. If consultation suggested a change on some occasions, it was almost invariably one of minor importance.

She was one of the incorporators of the Society of Colonial Dames of America, and its first registrar, holding that office for ten years, and resigning a year before her death. Those familiar with the society know something of the registrar's duties, but it may be said in brief, that through her hands passed all the papers, genealogical and otherwise, connected with the admission of new members; and that she was the person to whom all applicants turned for instruction or advice. As the many descendants of Massachusetts families are to be found in all parts of the Union, this implied a wide correspondence which was perhaps especially voluminous in the earlier years of the society before its scope and purpose were fully understood. Any new society, even if framed on the experience of others, finds many

unforeseen questions to deal with; and the registrar had not only to systematize her department, but to answer numberless inquiries, some of them requiring much consideration, and a wise interpretation of rules, which had not then been fairly tested or acquired the authority of a precedent. The amount of writing involved was very great, and she added to her labor by her anxiety to assist applicants in every possible way, and the pains she took to soften her refusals when these were necessary.

Her family relations were of the closest and warmest. While all the members of the family were strongly united, Mrs. Sprague and her two younger sisters, Mrs. Lyman and Mrs. Blake, were especially drawn together by association and feeling. The early marriage of Mrs. Lyman, the one next her in age, which took place before the others, gave her an opportunity to be of much affectionate assistance. Mrs. Lyman's devotion to the cares of a growing family often overtaxed her strength. On such occasions, and indeed at all times, Mrs. Sprague was at hand, seeking to be of service,

and her cheery presence was of almost daily occurrence in the household. To the children she gave a companionship and loving care second only to that of a mother; and they in return repaid her with an overflowing affection and appreciation. On all like occasions, when sympathy or help could be given, and in all family happenings, her first thought was how to be of service.

The fact that she had no children permitted her to devote much time to her parents, and in the case of her mother's long illness to be a constant companion. After her mother's death, her father was left alone and in broken health, and Mrs. Sprague went to live with him, and take charge of his household. The watchfulness and anxiety caused by his condition taxed her strength so severely that after some months her physician compelled her to give up her post in order to avoid a complete breakdown. Her father's death took place shortly after, and it was her lasting regret that she had not been able to be his companion until the end. Her health was restored by a voyage to Europe and a thorough rest.

She was exceedingly fond of children, and it was a delight to her to make friends with them and win their confidence, which she easily accomplished. Her many nieces and nephews were at all ages an unending source of pleasure, and nothing gave her greater gratification than a visit from them, or a call upon her hospitality. She was so young in her feelings that she could interpret their thoughts and wishes, and enter into all matters that concerned them with an interest similar to their own.

In addition to this youthfulness of feeling, and perhaps somewhat fostered by it, was an inborn shyness and modesty that she never outgrew, and that at times prevented her from taking her fitting position and assuming a responsibility for which she was abundantly qualified. She shrank from public situations, or the putting forth of her opinion in any public manner; but when occasion demanded, her earnestness of purpose overcame her hesitation, and she spoke clearly and well.

She was keenly alive to the affection and demonstrations of regard of her friends, which

she repaid in full; but her modesty did not allow her to appreciate how many people felt a personal friendship toward her, either from correspondence or from having been thrown with her in working for some common end. On these occasions and in her many societies, her high standards, her courtesy, amiability, and good sense, invariably won esteem, and it was the one most frequently brought in contact with her in discussing certain questions who spoke of her as "so high minded," and was the foremost in consulting her opinion.

Mrs. Sprague was a person with whom loyalty was a predominant trait. As has been already said, it was a part of her nature. She was loyal to her family, her friends, her church, to whatever cause she undertook. One sees such a number of persons in the world whose opinions, even when established, are so easily influenced, who change with the wind or cherish indifference as a virtue, thinking it a mark of superiority, that it is comforting to find some one with firm convictions, unhesitating, and outspoken in their support. Mrs. Sprague's beliefs were of the positive, not the negative

kind; and if they led at times to expressions of disapproval, down in her heart was a kindness that only needed opportunity to assert itself, and obliterate all feelings of censure. Her criticism was evanescent, her charity deep and lasting. Pervading all she did, and making a part of it, was her cheerfulness. This was partly natural and the result of faculties well employed, but also took strength from her determination to look on the bright side and her courageous acceptance of whatever trouble came to her. In her final illness, attended by paroxysms of acute pain, she kept this resolute cheerfulness unchanged, always greeting her household with a smile, and with thanks for any service rendered. In the shadow of these last days, she was uniformly patient, considerate, grateful, and uncomplaining.

As we think of her loss it seems to become greater. She was the centre of such a large circle, she so made a part of the life of those about her, that we cannot get accustomed to her absence, and the irremediable void it leaves. Perhaps the feeling of many may be described in the words of a woman in

her employ, a faithful friend and dependent, who had worked for her for over thirty years. "I cannot get used to Mrs. Sprague's death, but feel it more and more. Whenever I was in trouble, and I have had some sad experiences, she would sympathize with me, and advise me and comfort me. In any perplexity or trial I went to her, and in any good fortune she would rejoice with me. Now she is gone, I have no one to turn to, as I could to her, and the world seems a different place."

As we look back upon her life, that busy, useful existence, vibrating with activity, energy, and purpose, those many years filled with devotion, disinterestedness, and affection, that example of loyalty, cheerfulness, and courage, it is hard to believe that the places that once knew her shall know her no more; that her kindred and friends have seen her welcoming smile for the last time, that those dependent upon her will never receive of her bounty or counsel again; but her memory remains with us as a benediction, and for the record of her life it is written in the hearts of her friends."

The present writer, in talking with the kindred and friends of Mrs. Sprague, has come upon some pleasant pictures of the days of her youth, the days before the Back Bay had being, when Boston was so compact and quiet that little children played unattended in Pemberton Square, and all society attended the lectures of the Lowell Institute. Those were the days when some old-fashioned gentlemen still wore ruffles to their shirts and removed their bell-shaped hats with a graceful curve, and children not only loved their parents, but obeyed them. They even obeyed their deputies. One of Mrs. Sprague's intimates in those days has a pretty, quaint story of her first visit to the little Lissie, and how with vague trepidation, after they sat down at table she saw the older brother, Augustus, produce a plate of crusts, saying severely, "Lissie, mother says you've got to eat every one of those crusts before you can eat anything else!"

The small guest glanced at her friend, who was a high-spirited child. Mrs. Lowell, as well as Mr. Lowell, was away; the children were quite by themselves. But although the little girl

protested, she surrendered, she ate every one of the scorned crusts. In spite of the authoritative pose of youth, the relation between the brother and sister, even then, was peculiarly close and tender, and his unselfish care for his sister's interests grew with the years.

Long after, during the first desolation of his loss, she wrote of him to one of her nieces in these touching words:—

“No one knows all that he has been to me and done for me ever since we were little children together, and I have leaned upon him always for help and advice never refused me. Few people have such a brother, and I am very grateful to have had him, even if I must give him up now—and I must try to be as brave as he would have wished me to be. He admired fortitude always.”

The Lowells indeed were a most united family, devoted to each other, while interested in all their world.

It was while the Lowells lived in Pemberton Square that Mrs. Lowell held the Saturday receptions of which the memory still is fragrant. Her own beauty, charm, and tact, and her husband's high character and position

drew about them a remarkable circle. At this time there were living in or about Pemberton Square, on Temple Place, on Summer Street, on Chestnut Street and Beacon Hill, many of the old Boston families in which distinction seems hereditary, and whose strong hands have helped shape the conduct of the commonwealth in every generation. The Winthrops, the Endicotts, the Cabots, the Everetts, the Lowells, the Crowninshields, the Putnams, the Peabodys, the Lawrences, the Ticknors, the Russells, the Bryants, the Perkinses, the Eliots, the Shaws, the Amorys, were all more or less connected by marriage or neighborly ties, and they were all prominent figures in the social life of the time.

Boston was linked as closely then with Salem and Cambridge as now. The Lowell family had cousins and friends in Cambridge who visited them often and had uniquely delightful visits.

Picturesque as life was in Boston, it was happier and more picturesque in Mr. Lowell's country seat at Roxbury. A visit to it is thus described by one of the cousins:—

"My earliest distinct recollection of my cousin Lissie is of her kindness to my troublesome self on a certain Sunday afternoon in Roxbury, where I had been invited to make a visit to my playmate Ella. Whether it was the coming of so many strangers as were assembled for Sunday evening tea, or simply that it was my first visit alone away from home, I do not know, but I was seized with a sudden homesickness, and cried to be taken back to Boston. Though not more than eight years old, I can distinctly recall Lissie's sympathy with my woe and the cheerfulness with which she agreed to start away with Augustus, just as tea was ready, to drive me home. I can also recall her amusement without any (to me) perceptible sign of annoyance, when no sooner were we well on our way than I began to sing for joy. I am very sure that this was my only time of homesickness in Uncle Lowell's family, where year after year I spent many delightful weeks. Lissie and her friends were just enough older than Ella and myself to be regarded by us with great respect. I remember Lissie at the age of twelve as dreading an appointment at the dentist's and starting off for Boston quite a heroine in our estimation; whereupon Ella and I, deeply sympathizing, proceeded to play dentist and

made a hole in the cheek of one of our favorite dolls.

“The Roxbury place was a delightful country seat in those days. The old-fashioned house was shaded by tall trees, mulberry trees, and others in front. The garden with its box hedges stretched along to the woods, where there were green acorns and moss, and in the tower a dark wooden rocking-horse which had lost its legs, its ears, and its tail, but was none the less a horse to us. Farther along the path stood the statue of Pash, now in the Egypt room of the Museum of Fine Arts, the best preserved statue in the collection, sent home from Egypt by John Lowell, Jr., cousin to Mr. John Amory Lowell, and founder of the Lowell lectures. Not far away were the grapery and the greenhouse with its rare orchids. Miss Rebecca Amory Lowell and Miss Anna Cabot Lowell had just moved into their cottage at Broomley Side. The wood extended over the slope to the present Broomley Park, down to a brook where a broad seat had been made between the branches of a willow tree overhanging the water.

“From the piazza of the house one entered the large hall, which was papered with scenes of huntsmen and ladies in a forest.

The dining-room opened upon a garden. Some of the rooms upstairs were furnished with dimity curtains and coverings, and on the glass of one window were some rhymes that had been scratched upon it by an earlier generation of Lowells.

“Relations and friends used to drive over from Cambridge and Watertown and Boston, especially for the Sunday evening teas, and stroll about the garden and wood, as had been the custom when Uncle Lowell’s aunts were the young people of the house.”

To go out to Roxbury was an intoxicating experience to these well-behaved, demure little Boston children with their beautiful leghorn hats and their white pinafores, which must always be treated with respect. There was an annual May day picnic. It was a thrilling occasion. The children were met and led by the Lowells to a certain wood, where, fearless of kidnappers or tramps, they ate their rustic feast.

As the Lowell girls grew older they learned to enjoy one feature of the life which probably did not impress their childish minds. Many men of mark were the Lowells’ guests, for-

eigners as well as their own countrymen, drawn hitherward by the Lowell Institute and its administrator. Sir Charles Lyell, Agassiz, Tyndall among the foreigners, and Palfrey, Sparks, Bowditch, Felton, James Russell Lowell, and Rogers more particularly of the home contemporaries, were entertained at Boston or at Roxbury.

Agassiz was almost a child of the house. He went and came at will. Neither Mrs. Lowell nor the maids made objection to the pincushions used as butterfly mats, or the water-jug stuffed with ferns, or even the bureau drawers turned into the transient home of what the maids called "the professor's little beasts."

It may have been at Mrs. Lowell's that Mrs. Agassiz shrieked over her shoe, "Louis! there's a snake in it!" and the great Louis anxiously replied, "Only *one* snake, my dear? Why, where's the other? There were two!" But I have been told that Mrs. Lowell drew the line at snakes.

The Lowell Institute was a feature of the time. It was the palmy age of the Lyceums.

Every one went to lectures and discussed them. The great orator of the day, Edward Everett, spoke the universal sentiment when he closed his introduction to the lectures and his account of the founder with a glowing tribute to the future usefulness awaiting such an institution and the prophesy that it would perpetuate forever the name of Lowell.

The lectures were of extraordinary ability, and affected the thought of all cultivated people. But they waned in compelling interest before the rapidly approaching storm in national affairs. The anti-slavery agitation was spreading like a fire, bringing anger, fear, and discord in its wake, as well as pity and high devotion. Most of the leading Boston families were conservative, but young James Russell Lowell, and young Sumner, and some of the Shaws had joined the Radicals. There was no lack of excitement in the world into which young Elizabeth Lowell stepped, after her happy childhood and her school-days. An old friend of hers gives this little hint of a sketch:—

“Lissie was not quite a young lady then.

We were too young to go to parties, but we went to the bread and butter dances, as they were called. She had the most lovely arms and shoulders, and she was always beautifully dressed, and I used to admire her so much!"

She was a spirited, witty young woman, but all her old intimates speak of her sensitive modesty and her shyness. Of course she was moved by the mighty passions of the time. As she grew older the tragic march of events reached the whirlpool of civil war. Her young kinsmen and friends passed over Beacon Hill. No doubt she saw among them some of the cousins whose names on the tablet over the gates of Soldiers' Field have moved how many young hearts; but she did not see Shaw ride by at the head of his black regiment or turn for the last boyish smile and wave of his hand to his wife. At this time the Lowells were in Europe. They went for the benefit of Mr. Lowell's health, remaining over a year. Often afterwards Mrs. Sprague used to tell of the innumerable small trials and irritations caused by the general sympathy with the

cause of the South. They had great difficulty in getting any news, as the French papers kept back bulletins favorable to the Federals, and gave but scant accounts when there remained no doubt of their victories. Indeed, they heard of the battle of Gettysburg through the American minister some time before the French newspapers published any news about it. Upon their return to America, Mrs. Lowell and her older daughter were deeply interested in the work of the Sanitary Commission. To the Boston headquarters of the Commission came boxes and bundles from all parts of the State, which required arranging and redistributing. From one of these bundles, on which she was employed, Mrs. Sprague caught scarlet fever. Though fortunately the disease was not of a dangerous type, it was a sufficiently severe experience. After the war she had other vivid interests. She was always devoted to her sisters and their families. At the time of her sister Ella's marriage, she did wonders of fine hemming and embroidery on the wedding linen. She was an exquisite needlewoman all her life.

Her brothers' and sisters' children were none the less her joy after her own marriage. She was so fortunate as to have a husband who entered into all her interests, who gave her not only counsel and aid, but a never failing sympathy. In return, his interests, his hopes, and his cares became her very own. Dr. Sprague's parents were in feeble health. It was their son's custom to give up a certain time every day to visiting them. He let nothing avoidable interfere with this duty, and he interpreted the excusing adjective with austerity. The regularity of the daily visit was not the least part of its value. The invalids could expect it. They knew that it was sure; it brought a breath of the outside world. Mrs. Sprague used to collect amusing and entertaining bits of news and stories. Sometimes she read aloud. It was the custom to read aloud in the last century. She was a charming reader; she read with sympathy and without elocutionary poses — like a gentlewoman, not an actress. She could read a long while without tiring; and this art, which whiled away many hours for her own father,

and which was a delight to her husband's father, gave her a multitude of happy associations later, for she often read to her husband. I remember her saying once, "I sometimes forget books I read myself, but never books we read together. There is a different impression made by a book one reads aloud; it seems to stay."

Her husband has spoken of her devotion to her nephews and nieces; but one of her nieces has told the story from their point of view. **Mrs. Cabot says:—**

"The single word that best characterizes Aunt Lissie is devotion, and devotion in as intense and penetrating a sense as that in which Lincoln uses it in the Gettysburg speech, so that in thinking of her his words arise: 'It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to that cause for which they gave the last, full measure of devotion.' Devotion such as hers has its double aspect of overflowing love and of unswerving loyalty. This loyal love brought with it undaunted courage, the rare quality of endurance to the end, an entire humility, a readiness of self-sacrifice, and the perfected grace of courtesy and of

constant sunniness. Part of what made the world alive to us as children was her loving kindness that overflowed in countless bounty. It was as sure, as steadfast, and as far-reaching as our mother's love; it went back to the day of our birth, and kept those days with unforgetting welcome. It was she who treasured our early sayings and to whom they were as vivid thirty years later as when they were uttered; she who gave the wonderful French doll, and she who made every one of its many beautiful dresses. Her absorption in our interests was so great that we never doubted that she was as glad to make marvelous white and negro wishing-bone dolls with sealing wax heads and bead eyes, as we were to receive them. They were dressed in the gayest and most varied silks, never any two alike; their sealing-wax shoes were not forgotten, and they often had a necklace of beads round their throats. We did not ask how long it took to make them, nor did she ever hint at being too busy to give us all we wanted. Every year she gave me a birthday party, and year by year it changed in character as she recognized my need for different amusement, until when I was grown up, it became an evening dance in her beautiful drawing-room.

“In the days of our childhood she took her nieces and nephews on many exciting journeys, to the Philadelphia Centennial, to Niagara, to Brattleboro; and it seemed natural at the time, though it seems amazing now, that her sympathies with our childish desires made her urge my grandfather to take the New Haven Railroad home instead of the Albany solely in order that we might have the triumph of saying that we had passed through Connecticut and Rhode Island. These were the days, too, of long games of cards with her, first solitaire and then whist. Would any one else have thought of asking a little girl who devotedly loved whist to play with a stately, middle-aged gentleman on an evening when his partner gave out?

“It was the same endless devotion that has enriched us with many letters, for never did she forget to write to the many members of her family, and her letters to those of us who were abroad were to be counted on as absolutely regular and as filled with all the news that would interest us most. ‘I can’t possibly do enough for my precious children.’

“Her letters show her never failing remembrance of our tastes: ‘I have thought of dear Arthur a good deal to-day. Last year we were

together in Paris, and I tried to get some *mousse au chocolat* for him, but it was not what he remembered, though called by the same name. Do any of you keep stamps now? I will send for some if any of you want them, or will collect them in the countries where we go.'

"In 1882, after she had had a great shock and sorrow, she wrote: 'I was as always most glad to receive your dear letter, and the love of my dear nieces is even more precious to me, if possible. I shall not write to you at all about my sorrow, because I know you are sorry for me, and I do not want to sadden you.' This was always her brave attitude.

"One rare characteristic of her sympathy was that it included not only ourselves, but our intimate friends, so that her letters are full of the doings of our contemporaries, and they were so much with her that the name 'Aunt Lissie' came readily to their lips.

"During our childhood I associated her very much with dancing school, where she knew every child and parent, and watched with zealous care over the advance of her special charges, endlessly patient and persevering till every one could dance well.

"As I look back it seems as if almost all

her time must have been passed in sharing and enriching our lives, and yet they were the years when she was daily bringing help, and sunshine to her own parents and to Judge and Mrs. Sprague. Her wonderful embroidery was of these days, too, and beautiful pieces of lace work testify to the devotion that would take unwearying pains, and to the high standard that made her insist on taking out all the stitches that did not reach her ideal.

“There still hang in some of our chambers another lovely expression of her taste, illuminated missals in water color like those in old Liturgies, gay with bright-colored birds and tracery, and with some text woven in the centre.

“She was by nature a lover of children, and having none of her own, she did not give up the hope of their close companionship, but so won them by her own great devotion that they were perennially an intimate part of her life.

“‘I don’t want the children who come to see me to *ask* for candy,’ she said a few years ago, ‘so I always give it to them quickly before they have time to *ask*.’

“I never remember hearing her say or imply that the care of children was any trouble;

her accent was always on the generosity of the parents who 'lent' her their children for a little visit or pleasure trip, and on the 'goodness' of the children in being willing to come.

"Her devotion, so constant always, was trebled when any one of us was ill. During a long illness of mine some years ago, she sent me every day some different token, a wax blackberry, a flowering azalea, a decorative tape measure, or a book. When I thanked her for them she called these gifts 'little duds,' and utterly minimized the trouble and thought it must have taken to daily devise and bring to me something new. On another occasion, one of her nephews had what was at first called scarlet fever, but which turned out to be the first case of an epidemic of German measles which ran through the entire family. Contagion was no barrier to her, and she visited us every day. When a few weeks later, she found that she had caught the infection, she acted in her characteristic way. She went into her spare-room, taking with her a supply of books to read, gave orders that food should be left at her door, admitted no one, took the entire care of her room, and when the rash disappeared, threw the sheets and mattress out of the window, so that they might be thor-

oughly aired before any one had to handle them.

“Even in writing only of her relation to her nieces and nephews, no account would be adequate which did not speak of her tie to King’s Chapel, for we all felt its influence in her life, all knew that whatever the church needed in money, in committee work, in the development of stronger ties among its members, she would always respond whole heartedly to the need. It counted greatly to us also that we often found her waiting to greet us at the door of the church with a warmth that never grew less, however frequent the meetings.

“Up till within the last ten or fifteen years she often went abroad for the summer; and then her eager inquiry was as to what she could buy for us. To secure in Paris the entire outfit of a debutante was to her ‘no trouble at all,’ and I doubt if she ever went abroad without a long list of commissions or returned without a specially chosen present for each child. So at Christmas, in order to get the very best and newest gifts, she took a yearly trip to New York, and because it was great fun to go to New York, she often took a niece with her.

“Through all the years up to 1892 her life

was one of intense and unwearied devotion to her family and friends, to the needs of the church, and to charitable societies, but it had not yet reached out to take part in the welfare of the city, and had not yet found the relations to people all over the country which added so greatly to the richness of the last twelve years.

"In 1892 Mrs. John Lowell, wife of her elder brother, was severely injured by an electric car; and I think that it was her feeling that under safer conditions this catastrophe might have been avoided which led her to strive for a change in the system of running these cars and to support and work for the passage of a law requiring a subway under Tremont Street. During the agitation of this bill, she became familiar with legislative hearings, with members of the House and the Senate, and with the lawyers on both sides. Her interest grew and she took part in efforts to protect the Common, to prevent high buildings in certain sections of the city, and to enforce the law when it was violated. No winter passed that she was not interested in some such measure, and the eagerness these interests added to her life was beautiful to watch. She still found time to welcome all the nieces and great-nieces and nephews, from

the little one who came nearly every day to the school girls who dropped in with their friends at recess, and the elder nieces and nephews who came for her wise counsel and for the constant sunshine of her presence. Her public interest only strengthened her family life, and gave to all who knew her the wonderful inspiration of a growing life which makes age seem wholly irrelevant. Her life became more and more what Shakespeare expresses in the words of Juliet:—

“ ‘ My bounty is as boundless as the Sea,  
My love as deep ; the more I give to thee  
The more I have, for both are infinite.’ ”

The same note of loving gratitude and strong admiration is struck by all the large company of her nieces and nephews, and by their children. One speech out of many may be given here; it is that of a nephew very dear to her.

“ I do not remember,” he said, “ any time of life when a meeting did not make the day happier and encourage me, even when a little boy, if things went wrong. That kindly sympathy of hers understood so well, while it comforted, and never lost its nameless charm as I grew older, but was as fresh and grateful to

me the last time I saw her as when I first remember it."

Dr. Sprague has quoted the affecting testimony of one who had been in Mrs. Sprague's household. She truly represents those who are often closer observers of us than many of our own blood. My friend was loved by them who served her. It was a mutual affection and respect. And I found it easy to believe the niece who said to me, once, speaking of the general household unrest, the quicksands of shifting service, and the consequent domestic cataclysms, "That was one thing about Aunt Lissie; *she* never had domestic cataclysms!"

Remembering the warm terms in which she spoke of her domestic helpers and the consideration which she showed in a rare degree, one might give a guess at the reason for her immunity. But there was more than justice and kindness in the ordering of her household; there was the ability of the born executive, and the taste of the lover of beauty who had grown up amid beautiful things. The machin-

ery never creaked in her establishment. Exquisite cooking and service, dainty care of details came so naturally that the guest — who did not keep house — might fancy they were spontaneous, that like Topsy "they growed."

In her wide charities there appears continually the same "understanding heart." "I really can't expect a woman to have more of the virtues than I have myself simply because she is poor," she said to me once. "We ought to expect a great deal less of the very poor than of ourselves; sometimes I think we expect more."

A certain society to which she belonged had the care of poor widows. Mrs. Sprague visited the widows, she found out their pitiful histories, she helped them not only in what is called a substantial fashion, but with what is often the most real of help, comprehension and good will. She never read them moral lectures. She heard their confidences, making her shrewd, humorous, kindly comments much as she might make them to a friend of her own class. When she gave advice it was always in response to a demand, and given

with such an incidental casual air that like drugs in the modern capsule, it was felt but not tasted!

People do not abandon their names because they enter an institution, and they like to be called by them. Mrs. Sprague always remembered the names of those whom she visited. She kept their circumstances apart, and did n't inquire for the crippled son with six children of the widow who had only one blind spinster daughter. She was quite as carefully polite with them as with her friends. They felt — and with justice — that it was they themselves that interested her; they were not merely a charitable "case." This respect for unfortunate people's personality may be the secret of the love which so many had for the Lowell sisters.

Resolutions of the societies to which she belonged have a note of feeling not often found in official resolutions. A paper read at the Widows' Society, October 5, 1904, says: "She was the last of three sisters whose memories will ever be dear to the heart of many a poor woman and many a friend." On the

part of the quaintly named society, "The Needlewomen's Friend," in which she became a manager in 1866 and vice-president in 1877, holding this latter office till her death, the secretary says: "I cannot express to you how much we miss her from our meetings. She was so regular in her attendance that we never commenced our meetings until she came, unless we were sure that she was not coming. She had been connected with the society longer than any one living now. Her pleasant cordial manner made her beloved by all, and especially by the younger members of the board."

Dr. Sprague has spoken of the fight made for the subway. Of a kindred nature was the warfare on the high buildings. The owners of one notorious skyscraper determined in their own minds that possession of the air on the earth was nine points of the law. Therefore they ran up their building craftily, and before their intent was suspected were battering the horizon far above the sky-line. In that locality the law forbade a height over ninety feet.

"They can't build above ninety feet," said Mrs. Sprague to the desponding good citizens who mourned, but had no plan of redress.

"But they *have* built," was the dejected reply. "What can we do about it?"

"Make them come down," said Mrs. Sprague, undaunted. And this very thing was done. After every legal device of obstruction had been used in vain, the illegal addition was taken down.

Another example of the family spirit is given merely as an instance. All her life Mrs. Sprague was deeply attached to King's Chapel. Her whole family had this attachment; it was inherited like their coat-of-arms and their sense of humor.

At one time attendance on a special yearly service waned to a painful leanness. Light-minded people said, why not abandon the service; nobody but the Lowells came. The remark reached the Lowell family, and they rose as one man — or one woman. They hastened to interest nearly every member of the congregation in the service. One of them even

took her little daughter to it because she said every one counted. In the end an amazed rector gazed upon the big square red-cushioned pews overflowing with heads. The special yearly service was not abandoned.

It was through her sister, Mrs. Blake, and her niece, Mrs. Clarke, that Mrs. Sprague's interest was enlisted in the Society of Colonial Dames. Mrs. Blake, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Clarke, Mrs. Sprague, were among the incorporators of the society. Mrs. Blake was the second president. Mrs. Hale was vice-president; later (after Mrs. Blake's death) president of the society. Mrs. Sprague was registrar, and her niece, Mrs. Clarke, historian. The first Board of Managers was a band of kindred and intimate friends. From the beginning, beside their fundamental, patriotic, and pious ends, which the national constitution recites, they worked for two objects: to knit closer the ties between the widely scattered daughters of the makers of Massachusetts, and to renew the ancient kindliness between the States. The story has been told more than once, but it has its place here, how at the

council held at the time of the Spanish War, during which the method of aiding the soldiers and sailors came up, there was an inevitable recurrence of memory and speech to the Sanitary Commission. Finally there was a proposal to call the proposed organization of aid in the society by the old name. Mrs. Sprague, Mrs. Blake, and Mrs. Hale had been ardent workers in the day of the Commission, and although Mrs. Clarke was too young to have taken part in the Civil War, all the traditions of her own family and of the Clarkes were intensely Federal; yet so delicately and with such sympathetic wisdom did they help Mrs. Blake's proposal to substitute another title for a name laden with so many cruel memories to the South, that they won the gratitude of every Southern State. In that they had the coöperation of the whole Massachusetts delegation; Mrs. Blake's substitute, "The National Relief Association," was adopted. At the close of the council some of the South Carolina dames came to where the two sisters, their niece, and Mrs. Hale were standing, and one of them, extending both

hands to Mrs. Blake, cried, "Massachusetts, we have *loved* you!"

Undoubtedly the relief work drew North and South closely together, and the affectionate regard which had its birth in that season of sorrow and courage has steadily grown deeper and stronger. We may say now that there is an absolute obliteration of sectional feeling in the councils.

Mrs. Sprague's sunny humor and her tolerant friendliness were a potent help in this work, and her position as registrar made her of equal value among the Western States. She went to endless trouble to hunt up missing links in genealogical lines. In those earlier days — we do things better in the associate States now — some of the papers nearly gave the genealogists apoplexy they were so confused, so deficient, and so artlessly careless of authority. No one could appreciate order or precision — or practice it — better than she ; but where other registrars might return the erring paper with a crisp comment, invariably she took pains to write at length, without criticism, but with the pleasantest

sympathy and the most illuminating explanation of what was needed.

It is no exaggeration to say that she never had a correspondent for any length of time who did not become her warm friend.

I remember so many, so very many, who came to me during the last council of the society to ask about her, to regret her absence, and to say heartfelt words of gratitude and affection. "All I want to know," said one delegate, "is where Mrs. Sprague stands in this matter; that's where *I* am! She has studied it up in all its aspects, and I have unlimited confidence in her."

From all over the country when Mrs. Sprague died, there came words of sympathy and grief to her husband and nieces. A single extract will show how her influence was felt and how she was loved by those who had never seen her face.

"Her death came to us as a personal loss, as she had endeared herself to our hearts through her charming letters extending over a period of more than ten years. There was a sympathetic magnetism in the utterances of

her pen, which never failed to impress us that she was one of the truest of friends, although we have never had the pleasure of meeting her. Her refined courtesy, genuine interest, and warm sympathy made her year by year seem nearer to us; therefore we were greatly overcome when the message came that she had passed to the higher life.

“Mrs. Sprague’s influence was far-reaching, and she will be missed and mourned by a very large circle of friends. We cherish the sweet, kind, consolatory letter she wrote to us in our recent bereavement. The memory of her true, beautiful Christian life will be ever an inspiration and solace to our sorrowing hearts.”

It is not always that charm and business ability are combined in a woman. Mrs. Sprague inherited her mother’s charm and her father’s power of organization and extraordinary mastery of all the details of work. Her mind worked with swiftness and accuracy, and so admirable was her system that no accumulation of work or sudden stress ever excited her. Many are the testimonials to the accuracy with which she kept all the records of her office as registrar; and no one

offers ampler testimony to the value of her work than her successor in the office, while the present president of the society said:—

“Words are inadequate to express our feeling at the loss of Mrs. Sprague. Her interest in the society, her knowledge of its affairs, her wisdom, her judgment, and her kindness made her indispensable to the Colonial Dames of Massachusetts. We are indeed like a ship without a rudder.”

Mrs. Cabot’s words regarding the hospitality and the lavish generosity of her aunt’s heart are echoed by all who knew her well, not only by those whom she loved, but by that larger circle who did not know her intimately. She had the great gift of genuine interest in many people. Often the women of our New England race love a few intensely, while they have merely a tepid feeling of good will towards the most of their acquaintance. My friend loved with a wonderful passion of devotion those who were nearest of all, yet she kept a wide and widening enjoyment of the multitude outside. Truly said one who knew her well that “she made friends as

long as she lived, but she never gave up an old one."

And another in the circle of those remoter friends, herself far younger than Mrs. Sprague, and seeing her but seldom, has expressed a kindred feeling.

"How she will be missed!" she wrote. "Even I who knew her slightly can realize that. It used to give me a glow of pleasure every time I met her in the street or anywhere, her smile and glance were so kindly and cheery."

After Mrs. Sprague's death a number of letters came to the writer from her friends and members of the Society of Colonial Dames. A striking feature in these letters is the stress laid by every writer upon her sympathy, which was not only consoling but inspiring. She never belittled her friends' troubles, but she never despaired of them, either. If there was a gleam of hope to be found for a situation she found it; if not, she was sure it was there!

Some vivid quality in her cheerfulness defied those strong years that dull as they con-

quer. It was not the less vivid that it was so quiet and sane. One could not be with her without believing more in the duty of tranquil happiness. That she was a happy woman herself, in spite of many cruel griefs, impressed one most of all. No doubt her sunny temperament was helped by her happiness in the closest relation of life. She not only loved her brothers and sisters, her nephews and nieces, she enjoyed their society with a frank pleasure that was beautiful to see. With the deep happiness of her married life a stranger may not intermeddle; yet no one ever was in her home who did not feel its presence.

“Her married life,” says one who has a right to speak, “was one of rare and ever increasing beauty. More and more upon her and her husband shone the grace of lovers, and more and more they exemplified the beautiful comradeship of workers for mutual and noble ends.”

Perhaps nothing in that charming house impressed those of the younger generation more than the delicate courtesy shown by master and mistress to each other, quite as

much as to their guests. Mrs. Sprague's politeness was indeed not a graft, it belonged to the intimate texture of her soul. She learned its gracious manner of expression at her mother's knee, but the constant thought for others which was the root grew out of her unselfishness. How rare, how unconscious, how pervading, that unselfishness was! How it bound the hearts of her friends to her with the subtlest but the most compelling force! Over and over, too often to be enumerated, their grief for her told the same story:—

“She was the most sincere, loyal, and loving friend, not only to me, but to many others; and the most unselfish woman I have ever known.”

“She was a woman of wonderful courage and endurance and self-control, and more than all, unselfish for others.”

“To see her kindly smile approaching in the street was to feel that help and comfort were at hand.”

“She was a tower of strength to her friends in the emergencies of life, but she was a continual giver of small pleasures as well.”

A multitude of such tributes came from those who mourned her.

One who was of no kinship to her which they could trace, but whom she affectionately called "Cousin," once described graphically Mrs. Sprague's Christmas shopping.

"Mrs. Sprague always likes to go to New York about Christmas time because she can find different Christmas gifts there, you know, for her many nephews and nieces, and this to her is a great pleasure. Dr. Sprague sees to it that besides the shopping they see any good play running, and that Mrs. Sprague does n't tire herself. I say they run away to have a good time."

Certainly Mrs. Sprague's radiant face, as she described one of those times to me, bore out the description.

Mrs. Cabot has spoken of these Christmas gifts. They were chosen not only with her beautiful taste, but with a never failing memory of individual preference. Only one at once unselfish and keenly observing could so remember the circumstances and the wishes of her friends. Such thoughtfulness takes an

enormous amount of time. But hers, as one of her cousins wrote, truly was "a life that never knew lack of time when there was a duty to be done or a kindness to be rendered."

In the same strain her kinswoman and life-long friend paints her portrait: —

"If I were asked to describe in a few words what Lissie was, I should say there were two things which always stood out in my thoughts of her character. First, her tender and unselfish devotion to others, the warm sympathy and constancy to her friends, united with great kindness to every one.

"And next, what is perhaps quite as rare, the way in which she kept on growing to the end, so that she was a finer woman at fifty than at thirty, and yet more unusual, still finer at seventy than at fifty.

"And so we who have loved her could not help loving her more and more as the years went by, finding more to love."

While her sympathy most impressed her newer friends, her loyalty is as tenderly remembered by the older ones. One who knew her for many years says: —

“It was more a continually meeting and interchanging of thoughts and personal confidences than anything else — a knowledge of each other’s family interests and circumstances, unknown to other friends; and as one by one our families dropped away, we clung closer and felt we were nearer and more dependent upon each other. To me her loss is irreparable! No one can take her place. And now I on my journey all alone proceed. And I must be reconciled because she is no longer suffering, and God has given her rest; and in another world in which she firmly believed, she sees the faces of those she so much loved.”

And another writes: —

“She was my earliest friend when we were eight years old, and I came with my parents for a visit. After I was married and had not one relation in all Boston, she renewed the old friendship, and made me feel at home. The most loyal, kindly, tender of friends. I feel desolate without her.”

All her old friends mention her courage, which faced life and death with a smile. Hers was not only the courage of action and excitement, but the calm fortitude so much rarer.

"I recall her serene face," said one friend, speaking of her at the last, "her patience and quiet acceptance of pain, her resignation as she put aside one thing after another, not understanding, yet smiling and willing."

No mention of my friend would be complete that did not touch on a trait which made much for her happiness, her love of beauty. She had an instinct for beauty in material things, in art or literature, from whence came what we call so lightly "a charming taste;" and it was reflected in her homes, whether in the stately elegance of the great house in Boston, or in the simpler but not less dainty old-time 'plenishing of the house on the rocks at Nahant. But the pleasure which beauty of this sort brought her is not comparable with the happiness given her by her love of nature. From her childish days amid the green fields and the woods of Roxbury to the last of her life she felt the enchantment of the sun. She loved the rich bronze on the tree trunks, the moist grays on the rocks, the jeweled glow of the green hillsides, the changing mould and hues of the waves, the violet shadows of

the snow. And she loved the sea as the Swiss love their mountains. She delighted in every mood of the ocean. It was always a happy moment when the household moved to their Nahant home. The Nahant house was charming in every way, furnished with the old family treasures of Chippendale and Sheraton, and having a situation on the rocks which poised it like a ship above the waves.

Mrs. Blake used to say to those who admired the beautiful view from her own house by the sea, "Ah, but you should see my sister's view; the ships come in to her dining-room windows!"

The sunsets at Nahant were pageants. A letter to a niece describes one of them with loving and vivid touches.

"The evening that you left us we had the most wonderful sunset I ever remember, and we did so wish for you and Julia to see it. On the one side the lovely roseate glow, and at the other end of the piazza the moon already high enough for quite a wake, and yet daylight enough to distinguish the deep blue of the sea, and the green of the grass, and several white sails. It was really enchanting."

The last time I saw Nahant the west was faintly crimsoning in the glow of such a sunset, and its glory was on her face and her smile, as standing by her husband's side she waved us farewell.

She was preparing to go to the sea the May in which she died. Her illness was of several weeks' duration, but until the last few days she went downstairs every day, and in spite of almost constant pain she was her own cheerful self. Once I said to her, "I always heard that intercostal neuralgia was so painful; does n't it hurt you all the time?" She laughed. "Well, I know it's *there!*" said she. Her gayety, her splendid vitality, her interest in every personal or public detail, were so unabated that her death came as a shock even to her nearest friends. They could not realize a bravery which made so light of pain. Yet in truth it was not so much because she was stoical as because she was loving and unselfish that so far as in her lay she spared those who loved her the knowledge of her suffering. To the very end she smiled her thanks and love.

And to us still who loved her she is always smiling; it seems the noblest and the rarest part of her who had so many rare and noble traits, this faithful cheerfulness which irradiated from her brave soul, blessing all who felt its light, and of which the very memory lifts our fainter hearts.



**MDCCCXXXI ♡ MCMIV**



